DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 491 CS 506 746

AUTHOR Lindstrom, Anna K. B.; Samovar, Larry A.
TITLE Cultural Perspectives on Love.
PUB DATE Feb 89
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association (Spokane, WA, February 17-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; Comparative Analysis; *Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Context; *Cultural Differences; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; Interpersonal Relationship; Metaphors
IDENTIFIERS India; Iran; Japan; *Love; Norway

ABSTRACT

To examine how different cultures define and express love, a study focused on the discourse concerning love as advanced by four students from India, Iran, Japan, and Norway. The discourse was recorded on two different occasions: an extended interview about students' perceptions of love both in their countries and in the United States; and a panel discussion on the subject of love. The tapes yielded one hour of discourse which was analyzed as a means of isolating likenesses and differences in how cultures perceive and signal love. The discourse was examined by combining B. Brummett's "consensus criticism" and G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's theory of metaphors. Analysis revealed that international students used four dominant metaphors in their perceptions as well as expressions of love: love as a product; love as play; love as a contract; and love as responsibility. This finding reveals the important role metaphors play in intercultural communication. (MM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED309491

Cultural Perspectives on Love

Anna K. B. Lindström and Larry A. Samovar

Department of Speech Communication

San Diego State University

Intercultural Communication Interest Group

Western Speech Communication Association Convention

Spokane, WA

February 1989

Running head: LOVE

CS506746

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Anna Lindstrom

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"Love is above all the gift of oneself." Jean Anouilh

"Words are the weak support of cold indifference, love has no language to be heard." William Congreve

"Without outward declarations, who can conclude an inward love?" John Donne

"In order to love simply, it is necessary to know how to show love." Dostoevsky

"Try to reason about love and you will lose your reason." French Proverb

"Immature love says 'I love you because I need you.' Mature love says 'I need you because I love you." Eric Fromm

"Words have no language which can utter the secrets of love." Hafiz

"We don't love qualities, we love persons, sometimes by reason of their defects as well as of their qualities." Jacques Maritain

"We never, then, love a person, but only qualities." Pascal

"Love is not dumb. The heart speaks many ways." Racine

"They do not love that do not show their love." Shakespeare

"Where there is love, there is pain." Spanish Proverb

Love has various lodgings, the same word does not always signify the same thing." Voltaire

Cultural Perspectives on Love

It has been said that love makes the world go round, but is it the same love for all of the world? That question is the subject of this paper. More specifically, do all cultures define and express love in the same way?

Like so many research questions, the original impetus for this study came from a most curious place - a graduate seminar. Let us explain. On a night when the seminar in intercultural communication was discussing the role of the family in forming cultural values, the conversation drifted to the topic how children learn about love. Some American students decided that one way children learn about love was by listening to their parents saying such things as "I love you Jan." However, just when the Americans were ready to move on to another topic, a Japanese member of the class offered an observation about love that seemed to destroy the hypothesis being advanced by her American colleagues. What she said, in essence, was that she had never heard her parents say they love each other, nor had she seen them display the outward signs of love described by the other students. One American student was so taken back by these remarks that

she asked the woman from Japan how she knew her parents were even in love. The response, which was said with great sincerity, confused the class even further. For the Japanese student simply said, "Oh, they just know they love each other." At that moment we were convinced that we had a topic that was worthy of further study.

We soon discovered that being in love was universal, but that perceiving and expressing love was culturally based. Take for example the Chinese film "The Mighty Sword" (Than Chau Kiem Khach). In this film one gets a feel for the Chinese way of romance. The hero and heroine do not touch; most certainly they do not fondle or kiss. With a particularly sad melody in the background, they look into each other's eyes. Folklore, proverbs, and songs all depict a romance of the eyes: "Like a knife cutting the yellow betel leaf, / His eyes glance, her eyes dart back and forth."

Procedure

Selecting the appropriate methodology to investigate cross-cultural comparisons of love was not an easy task, for feelings and expressions of love fall into the category of what Pearce and Branham (1978) call the

ineffable. The ineffable refers to experiences that cannot be conveyed to other people such as "moments of mystical insight, rapturous peak experiences, artistic perceptions, or religious ecstasy" (Pearce & Branham,1978, p. 351). The problem with the topic of love is that some cultures behave in ways that support its ineffable character while others "talk about it" freely and openly. For example, for the Japanese the word "ishindenshin" describes their view of love. This world literally means to communicate from mind to mind or from spirit to spirit (Tsujimura, 1968). Yet for most Westerners love involves the willingness to express, in words and behavior, various feelings and attitudes which exist about the relationship (Rogers, 1961). So the question remains: how do we investigate a concept as universal and complex as love?

Our options included research techniques ranging from controlled experiments to watching people on street corners all over the world. Both of these were rejected, at least for now, as unacceptable. We had even considered examining the art, film, and literature of selected cultures as a way of determining how love was defined and expressed. While these

techniques might be useful in follow-up studies, we decided to look elsewhere for content and methodology.

Content

The present study focused on the discourse concerning love as advanced by four foreign students from India, Iran, Japan, and Norway. The interlocutors were all proficient in English as the students had attended a California university for at least two years while maintaining a grade point average of above 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale).

The discourse was recorded on two different occasions. First, an extended interview was held with the students as a way of encouraging them to "talk about" their perception of love both at "home" and in the United States. Second, a tape recording was made of the students taking part in a panel discussion on the subject of love. This second meeting was held in front of an American audience and dealt with foreign perceptions of how Americans express love as well as how the concept is revealed in other cultures. The tapes yielded one hour of discourse which was analyzed as a means of isolating likenesses and differences in how cultures perceive

and signal love.

Methodology

The discourse was examined by combining Brummett's (1984) consensus criticism and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of metaphors. These two positions offered the researchers a theory base that justified looking at discourse about love as well as specific methodological guidelines.

Consensus Theory. Brummett outlined two basic assumptions for consensus criticism. The first assumption highlights the intricate relationship between meaning and experience. According to consensus theory "human apprehension and ordering of the world is unavoidable shaped and tempered by symbolic systems through which we filter all our perceptions" (p. 113). This notion is emphasized in intercultural communication between members of different lingustic groups since "each language both embodies and imposes upon its users and their culture a particular world view that functions not only as a device for reporting experience but also, and more significantly, as a way of defining

experience" (Samovar & Porter, 1985, p. 203).

The second postulate of consensus criticism is that the world "as people apprehend it is plural, and therefore truths or truth statements about that world may be plural, simultaneously contradictory, and provisional" (Brummett, 1984, pp.112-113). Again, this notion may be exemplified in the intercultural arena. Samovar, Jain and Porter (1981) argued that the adoption of this assumption is essential for the development of empathy and intercultural understanding. They noted that "the philosophical assumption necessary for empathy is a multiple-reality theory, which holds that not all people see the same view of the world" (p. 209).

Metaphoric Theory It is our belief that Lakoff and Johnson's theory of metaphors is appropriate for our analysis for three reasons. First, metaphoric theory coincides with the underlying assumptions of consensus criticism. Lakoff and Johnson argued that "what is real for an individual as a member of a culture is a product both of his social reality and of the way in which that shapes his experience of the physical world" (p. 146). This implies the existence of multiple realities as "people with different

conceptual systems than our own may understand the world in a very different way than we do" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 181).

Second, the topic of the discourse, love, seemed to lend itself to metaphoric analysis. Lakoff and Johnson maintained that while most of our experience is shaped via metaphor, this is most evident in terms of emotional concepts as they are "not clearly delineated in our experience in any direct fashion and therefore must be comprehended primarily indirectly via metaphor" (p. 85). The authors argued that in American culture the comprehension of love is primarily metaphorical and understood "in terms of concepts for other natural kinds of experience: JOURNEYS, MADNESS, WAR, HEALTH, etc." (p. 119).

Third, Lakoff and Johnson's observation that "metaphor provides a way of partially communicating unshared experience" (p. 255) only serves to underscore the relationship between metaphors and attempts to express the ineffable. For Lakoff and Johnson the "metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is of mere words, on the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical" (p. 6). This implies that we use metaphors to

comprehend the world. Our study, though limited, would support this notion. For example, when our subjects were asked how they thought Americans would define love, they all used metaphors to answer the question.

The purpose of the following metaphoric analysis is twofold. First, we will identify the dominant metaphor that was used to describe a concept. Second, we'll suggest some of the entailments of the use of the metaphor and show proofs of these entailments in the discourse. The latter part of the analysis is hence concerned with what Lakoff and Johnson defined as "internal coherence" (p. 89). This concept is of particular importance since "in allowing us to to focus on one aspect of a concept -- a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects that are inconsistent with that metaphor" (p. 10).

Preliminary Findings

Early results of the analysis suggested that the international students used metaphors in their perceptions as well as expression of love. An examination of the discourse revealed four dominant metaphors: love as a

product, love as play, love as a contract, and love as responsibility.

Love as a Product. The predominant metaphor used by the international students to define love in American society was that of love as a product or consummable good. The Indian student stated "When I think of American love it's like the plastic society they've got, everything is disposable, loving is like that, disposable."

The conception of love as a consummable good entails a profit motive. The Iranian student stated: "It [love] is materialistic. Everything is materialistic. You love somebody in order to get profit or material." The Norwegian student added: "You love their bank account. You're more prone to love a person with money than a person without money." Love as a product also implies the importance of packaging. The Indian student said "It [love] is all on visual, how beautiful you are. Just physical and that's it." Another entailment is that you can express your views on the love object much as you state your like or dislike for a product. The Japanese student noted that "They're open to it [love]. If they like something, they'll tell you, if they don't, they'll say 'Hey guy, I don't care!' They're pretty frank and

honest. They tell you exactly what they think." Finally, by defining love as a product it is implied that love can be discarded. The Iranian student had strong feelings with regards to this:

> You can see many marriages which ends through a divorce. And the people who have been living together for a long time can just separate without any kind of feeling and say O.K. you go your way and I go my way and no feelings. They can ignore each other very easily.

The use of metaphors was also apparent when the international students were asked to describe love from their own cultural orientations as they spoke of love by making metaphoric allusions to play, contract, and responsibility.

Love as Play. The Norwegian student emphasized the concept of love as play as he offered thoughts on love from a Scandinavian perspective. He noted that, especially for the young, love is "just for play -- someone to play with and talk with." As one grows up however, the play takes on a different nature: "as you grow older it [love] becomes more serious, more

problems or pleasure." The playful attitude toward love is still present however. This is especially apparent in terms of attitudes toward sexual relations. The student said that sex is "part of going steady with someone." He emphasized that while there is "a relaxed attitude toward sex before marriage" the rules of the game demand fidelity: "in most relationships you want the one you're together with to be faithful to you and vice versa." The Norwegian student's use of the play metaphor in describing Scandinavian love is substantiated by Nordic languages. The literal translation of the Swedish word for love, "karlek", is affectionate or loveful play.

One entailment of the conception of love as play is that you want to be compatible with the other player. The student implied this in explaining the practice of cohabiting before marriage: "It is considered strange to marry someone without living together and trying things out --to see if you work together both in the house and in the bed." The emphasis on the importance of learning compatability is apparent in the Norwegian proverb: "You shouldn't hunt around so nervously but learn to love the little things that are close to you" (De vackraste orden om karlek:

Aforismer från tre årtusenden, 1988).

Love as a Contract. The Indian and the Iranian students spoke of love as a contract. The Indian student defined love as "a private transaction between two consenting adults." She distinguished between the emotional and rational aspects of love and stated that emotional love is considered "an unreliable basis for marriage." In explaining this she noted an Indian proverb that states "never marry the one you love but love the one you marry." The emphasis on the irrational nature of passion is evident in another Indian proverb: "Just like rain hits a poorly insulated hut, passion hits a thoughtless mind" (De vackraste orden om karlek: Aforismer från tre årtusenden, 1988).

If one perceives of love as a contract it becomes important to note how the contract is established. Both students emphasized that the set up of this contract rests on rational reasons rather than emotions. The Iranian student said that "love doesn't exist at the beginning. It initiates by the family and after a long time it develops and develops and finally they [husband and wife] love each other until they die." Another entailment of

the contract metaphor is that of mutual benefits. The Iranian student noted that prior to marriage the families of the prospective husband and wife try to demonstrate the achievements of their son or daughter. In India the woman is expected to contribute to the marriage through "dowry." The Indian student noted that this is common practice in India even though it is prohibited by law.

Love as Responsibility. The metaphor of love as a responsibility was evident in the Japanese student's discussion of love from a Japanese perspective. This metaphor implies that love primarily is shown in terms of care for others. The Japanese student noted that her parents never had hugged her and that "my mom never said 'I love you Fumie' and my dad never said 'I love you Fumie'." When asked how affection is shown, she noted that it is more subtle, for example, a mother might show love by brushing her child's teeth. The most important expression of love is thus found in the care for others as articulated in the Japanese proverb "To be loved is to be tied up..." (De vackraste orden om karlek: Aforismer från tre årtusenden, 1988).

The Japanese student explained that adult children have the responsibility of caring for their parents. She told of a friend of hers who had given up a highpaying job in the United States to go back to Japan to care for his mother as she needed him. The Japanese student said that this sense of love sometimes can have tragic consequences as "the notion of love can carry into suicide." If a family is experiencing grave problems the parents may choose to kill not only themselves but also their children. This is because "parents worry what will happen to their children after they die. They are worried that the children might have to take over their [the parents'] problems and that they may not be able to solve them." By discussing love in terms of a responsibility, the Japanese student was able to provide an explanation for a cultural practice that otherwise might be difficult to fathom from a Western perspective.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

The purpose of this brief analysis was to explore how individuals attempt to comprehend and construct messages pertaining to unshared (ineffable) experience across cultural boundaries. While the limited sample

size confines the conclusions generated by this study, we nevertheless believe that a few observations may be advanced.

First, this essay has shown the important role metaphors play in intercultural communication. The foreign students used metaphors both to comprehend love in American society and to describe love in their indigenous cultures. This finding is consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's contention that "metaphorical imagination is an important skill in creating rapport and in communicating the nature of unshared experience" (p. 231).

Second, this analysis has shown that the use of metaphors forces us to highlight certain aspects of reality. This was perhaps most obvious in the way the foreign students used metaphors to understand love from an American perspective. The metaphor love as a product or consummable good forced them to look at the material and visual aspects of love rather than the psychological and affective aspects. The metaphor seemed to hide or undermine certain facets of love. This was apparent in the way the Iranian student conceived the break-up of a relationship in American culture as he noted that "they can separate without any kind of feeling." A

different metaphor could have provided an entirely different conceptualization of love. If he conceived of American love as a journey for example, he might place more emphasis on the fact that there is a purpose (destination) to a relationship and that the individuals who take part in a relationship develop (travel) as the relationship unfolds. Moreover, the journey metaphor may emphasize the excitement associated with relationships.

While metaphors may allow us to express the ineffable across cultural boundaries they may also lure us into biased conceptions of other cultures. It is therefore important to make individuals aware of both the potentials and limitations of metaphors. A thorough understanding of metaphors may provide us with a richer and more creative experience of cultural differences.

The innocuous nature of the discourse examined in this essay limits the weight of the findings. A more thorough investigation is needed to further document the extent to which metaphors are used in intercultural communication. The concept of love is worthy of further study. That study

can take many forms and employ a variety of research tools. We have asked the questions concerning the link between culture and love, we now encourage others to help us supply the answers.

References

Brummett, B. (1984). Consensus criticism. Southern Speech Communication Journal, 49, 111-124.

De vackraste orden om karlek: Aforismer från tre årtusenden (1988). Stockholm, Sweden: Info Books AB.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). Metaphors we live by. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pearce, W. B., & Branham, R. J. (1978). The ineffable: An examination of the limits of expressibility and the means of communication. In B. D. Ruben (Ed.) Communication yearbook: 2 (pp. 351-362). New Brunswick: Transaction Books.

Rogers, C. (1961). On becoming a person. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Samovar, L. A., Jain, N. C., & Porter, R. E. (1981). Understanding intercultural communication. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Samovar, L. A., & Porter, R. E. (1985). Intercultural communication: A reader. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Tsujimura, A. (1968). Japanese culture and communication. Tokyo: N. H. K. Books.